



AMPUTEE.IE

Supports to help you following an amputation

Having an amputation can be traumatic. We produced this booklet to tell you about the services and supports from the many agencies that are ready to help you and respond to your needs.

We hope that the booklet will help you on the road to recovery and independence and remind you that you are not alone.

"Losing a limb is a tremendous loss. We all go through a period of bereavement and grieving before we are able to readjust to our new body and situation."

"Many feel that they don't know where to begin, or how to get their lives back together. It can seem like such a huge mountain to climb to learn to do things independently again."

Adjusting to the loss of a limb

One of the best things you can do following an amputation is to aim to get back to the quality of life you enjoyed before. At all times, try to be positive, with the mental attitude of “Yes, I can”.

However, if you are finding it difficult to cope with the loss of your limb(s), help is available from a number of sources. Your hospital may be able to offer you counselling or you can find a counsellor in your area by contacting:

- your local health centre;
- your nearest Citizens Information Centre (see www.citizensinformation.ie) or public library; or
- the Irish Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (www.irish-counselling.ie) at iacp@iacp.ie or on (01) 272 3427.

Getting a prosthesis

A prosthesis is an artificial limb. It can be made from different types of materials and have different types of sockets.

The hospital should refer you to a person called a prosthetist. This person will discuss your options with you and work to choose the safest and most suitable type of prosthesis for your individual needs.

When your prosthesis is ready, you will be shown how to use it safely before you can take it home. You will need to return to the prosthetist to have your prosthesis adjusted if necessary. At the very least, you should return once a year for a check-up.

Using your prosthesis

When you use your first prosthesis, it may feel very heavy and bulky. This is normal. Using it will require extra energy, which may leave you feeling more tired than before. You will also need to be more aware of safety, so you will probably begin to see things differently.

Because it is artificial, a prosthesis will never be quite as well attached as your other limb, and so will always feel a little heavier. However, any prostheses you get in the future will be less bulky, as the remaining part of your limb shrinks over time.

Avoid putting on or losing much weight, as this will affect how well the prosthesis will fit the rest of your limb. Follow advice on a suitable diet for your needs – you can ask your doctor to refer you to a dietician if you like.

Managing pain and other sensations

It is common for amputees to feel 'phantom sensations' in the limb that has been removed. Although some sensations can feel extremely strange, they are not usually painful and are a normal part of life as an amputee.

However, as many as 8 out of 10 amputees may have continued pain. This pain is normally one of three types.

- Phantom pain (different from phantom sensations) – pain in the part of the body that is no longer there. It can include burning, freezing, pins and needles and severe tightness of the skin.
- Residual limb pain – pain in the part of the limb that remains. It is thought to be different from phantom pain and is not usually related to wearing a prosthesis. It can sometimes be very severe.
- Pain or discomfort from the prosthesis – usually due to changes in your remaining limb, which can lead the socket to cause pain or discomfort. An artificial limb has a fixed shape and volume, so ask your prosthetist to adjust it if it is hurting you.

Pain can be exhausting and reduce your quality of life. But it can be managed, so tell your consultant, prosthetist or doctor if you are suffering. They can advise on medication or you can research alternative remedies.

Financial support

Medical costs

Prosthetic limbs are expensive. Generally, your first limb will be free, but you can only receive further free prostheses from the HSE if you have a medical card. For advice about medical cards, see the www.medicalcard.ie or contact your local health centre or the social worker at the hospital you are attending.

If you do not qualify for a medical card, your health insurance company may cover you for prosthetic limbs. Check with your provider for details.

Social welfare

Many people who have had amputations can apply for social welfare payments such as Disability Allowance or Invalidity Benefit. For information on these and other payments, visit the Department of Social Protection website, www.welfare.ie, or contact the:

- Department of Social Protection Lo-call Information Line on 1890 202 325;
- Department's Information Service on (01) 704 3000;
- Citizens Information Centre website, www.citizensinformation.ie, or its lo-call information line 1890 777 121; or
- Community Welfare Officer at your local health centre.

Adapting your home

Home is a place to feel safe, secure, comfortable and at ease. Amputation may change that and it may become a difficult, hostile or even hazardous environment.

You should consider how you will manage at home if there are some days when you cannot use the prosthesis. Changing floor surfaces or the layout of furniture can make a significant difference.

If you only need to do minor work in your home, you can apply for the Mobility Aids Grant Scheme. This is means tested, meaning that your income and your assets (apart from your home) will be checked to see if you could afford the works without the grant.

If you do not qualify for the Mobility Aids Grant Scheme or if you need to do major work to adapt your home, you can apply for the Housing Adaptation Grant for People with a Disability. This grant may allow you, for example, to:

- make your home wheelchair accessible,
- build an extension to create more space,
- add a ground floor bathroom, toilet or stair-lifts, or
- improve heating.

You can get more details about either grant from the housing section of your local authority. See www.environ.ie for contact details.

Getting around and driving

Support and allowances are available to help and encourage you to be as mobile as possible.

Two types of assistance are available to help you get around if you cannot use a car.

- The Free Travel Scheme, run by the Department of Social Protection, is available to some people for State public transport (and some private services). See your Citizens Information Centre or see www.citizensinformation.ie for details on how to get a Free Travel Pass.
- Mobility Allowance is a monthly means-tested payment from the HSE for people who cannot walk or use public transport due to a disability. The allowance is generally for people aged 16 to 66. If you receive it before reaching age 66, it will continue after your 66th birthday.

Many people are able to drive after an amputation, but you should tell your insurance company first, as it may affect your cover if you do not.

If you have a car, you may be able to claim back the vehicle registration tax (VRT) and VAT if:

- you are a driver or passenger with a physical disability,
- the car is specially adapted, and
- you receive a Primary Medical Certificate from the HSE.

You can get more information about this from the booklet VRT 7 'Vehicles for People with Disabilities – Tax Relief Scheme', available on www.revenue.ie, or by calling 1890 306 706.

Motorised Transport Grant is another means-tested payment from the HSE. It is intended for people with disabilities who need to buy or adapt a car to find or keep employment. For more information, contact the HSE's National Information Line on 1850 24 1850 or contact the Mobility Allowance Department of your nearest HSE Area Office.

You can also get information from the:

- Disabled Drivers Association (www.ddai.ie) on (094) 936 4054 or (094) 936 4266 or at info@ddai.ie; or
- Irish Wheelchair Association National Mobility Centre (www.iwa.ie) on (045) 893094 or (045) 893095 or at maats@iwa.ie.

Working and training

If you are concerned about returning to work, you can ask your occupational therapist or the occupational health officer at your work for advice.

FAS offers grants for people with disabilities to train or return to work. They include the Employee Retention Scheme and Workplace Equipment Adaptation Grant. Contact your local FAS Employment Service Office or phone FAS on freephone 1800 611 116 for more details. The HSE Vocational Service can also give you advice (www.hse.ie).

Your rights

As a person with a disability, you have the right to be treated fairly, to be free from discrimination on the grounds of your disability and to have your physical, emotional and social needs or desires respected. A number of laws protect your rights, including:

- Disability Act 2005
- Employment Equality Acts 1998 and 2004, and
- Equal Status Acts 2000 to 2004.

The Disability Act requires Government departments and other State bodies to remove barriers to disabled people who might wish to use their services. The equality laws apply to all organisations.

Join Amputee Ireland

Amputee Ireland (Amputee Disability Federation Ireland - ADFI) represents the best interests of all amputees in Ireland. We encourage you to become a member and have your voice heard. Membership is free. You can download an application form on our website or you can apply for membership using the address below.

Know that you are not alone – together we are stronger.

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This service is staffed by volunteers. We will aim to respond without undue delay.

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